



Unit 2

Youth Issues Agenda

Unit Overview

Introduction

In the second unit of Student Voices: Campaign, students explore issues of importance to their community and develop their Youth Issues Agenda, which will guide the rest of their research throughout the semester.

Lesson 1: Community Issues

Students are asked to think of issues most important to them as individuals and as a class. Students broaden their perspective on community issues by interviewing other members of the community.

Lesson 2: Use Data to Understand Community Issues

Students use data to determine demographic trends that may relate to community issues.

Lesson 3: Conducting a Survey

Students learn about polling and surveying through readings and experience. They develop, administer, tabulate, and interpret a community survey about issues, citizen knowledge, or voting behavior.

Lesson 4: Developing the Youth Issues Agenda

Having conducted interviews in the community or a survey to research community issues, students analyze their data to make sense of what they learned, summarize their results, and add to their list of issues. As a class, students select the 1-5 issues they consider to be the most important and determine that these will form their Youth Issues Agenda.

Lesson 5: How Will You Make Your Voices Heard?

Students use a concept map to determine how they will disseminate information about the campaign. NOTE: This work is meant to constitute a semester-long project, but teachers may opt to do additional small projects throughout the semester for assessment purposes.



Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Identify issues in their community
- Understand the interrelation among various issues in the community
- Conduct neighborhood interviews to validate classroom perceptions
- Classify issues according to issue subject

Preparation before Lesson 1

- Make copies of [Who Votes?](#)
- Make copies of [Community Interviews](#) sheet.



Lesson Plan

1. Ask students to write down five community strengths and five community problems.

NOTE: “Community” can be defined in a variety of ways. It might be used to mean the neighborhood in which students live, the neighborhood in which they go to school, the school itself, or some other definition entirely. Consider whether you want to provide students with a definition of community to work from, or whether you would rather they decide amongst themselves what definition of community they want to use.

2. Have students mark which community strength makes their city or town a good place to live and which community problem is the most important to address.
3. Put students in groups of 3-4 to share their ideas on what works well in their community and in what areas the community could improve.
4. Ask the class which items came up most frequently in their groups and write these on the board. Begin to categorize the specific items under broader headings. (Students are more likely later to find issues discussed in the campaign or media in terms of such broad categories.) Make sure to lead students toward ideas that can be acted on by local government. This activity also helps students to see their specific issues as part of the larger community discussion. NOTE: Be sure to save this list for Day 4 of this unit.
5. (Optional) Take students into the school community in groups of two to four with an adult. Have the students walk around the area and interview people they pass by, using the **Community Interviews** sheet. If possible, have the students use a camera or video recorder to document interviews.

Specific Issues	CATEGORY
litter; abandoned buildings	ENVIRONMENT
large class size; school repairs	EDUCATION
unemployment; more businesses	ECONOMY
drugs; violence; theft	CRIME
terrorism; safe neighborhoods	SECURITY
need for insurance; hospitals	HEALTH
others...	TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING



Assignment Suggestions

- Hand out the [Community Interviews](#) sheet and ask students to use it to interview three people in their community, asking them to identify areas in which the community could improve. Students can use family or friends for these interviews. Encourage safety in selection of people to interview.
- (Optional) Have students look at their local newspaper (either in hard copy or online from the [Student Voices website](#)) and write down two issues that they found in the newspaper that concern their community.



Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Interpret data to identify trends in their community
- Understand the impact of community trends on community issues
- Evaluate findings as a means of identifying community issues

Preparation before Lesson 2

- Arrange for Internet access for your students to use the U.S. Census Bureau's website <http://factfinder.census.gov>
- If Internet access is not available to students in the classroom, go to the Census Bureau's website, <http://factfinder.census.gov>, and use the directions in the Lesson Plan to print out for students:
 1. **Fact sheet with demographic profile** for your city, town, county, zip code or state and make copies for students
 2. **Population Finder sheet** showing trends from 1990-2003 for your city/town or county
- Print out copies of **Analyzing Data to Understand Issues**.



Project Idea

- Analyze data to identify trends in the community that could be issues in the campaign. Display findings graphically.



Lesson Plan

- Explain to students that another way to understand what is happening in their communities is by looking at census data. Hand out copies of **Using Data to Understand Issues** for students to use to compile information about their communities.
- If you have Internet access for the class, have students either individually or in pairs use the Student Voices website to go to the American Fact Finder website of the U.S. Census Bureau (or go directly to <http://factfinder.census.gov>). At the top center of the homepage, under “Fast Access to Information,” they will see a screen that says “Get a Fact Sheet for Your Community.” Here students will have the option for entering their city, town, county, or zip, or their entire state.
- If students do not have Internet access, distribute copies of the relevant fact sheets.
- Ask students to use the data in the Fact Sheet to answer the questions in Part 1 of **Using Data to Understand Issues**.
- Next, ask students to return to the homepage of the American Fact Finder website. On the upper left hand side of the homepage, they should click on “Population Finder,” which will take them to a page that allows them to enter the name of their city, town or county and find out how the size of the population has changed since 1990. (If no Internet access is available, distribute copies of the page that shows these population figures.)
- Ask students to use this data to complete Part 2 of **Using Data to Understand Issues**.
- Discuss with students the demographic trends they found for their community and the kinds of issues those trends might present. Ask students if the data have suggested new issues to add to their list of issues that concern them.

Assignment Suggestion

- Ask students to use **Using Data to Understand Issues** to write a 1-page essay describing 1) their community’s demographic make-up, 2) its pattern of growth or decline, and 3) what issues this data raises for the community.



Overview

Lesson Objectives

- Understand the elements of survey design
- Interpret survey results
- Evaluate surveys as a means of identifying community issues
- Classify issues according to issue subject

Preparation before Lesson 3

- Make one copy of [Survey Savvy](#) for each student.
- (Optional) Make one copy of [Interviewing and Polling](#) for each student.



Project Idea

- Conduct a survey on community attitudes, knowledge about local government, opinions about issues in the community, or voting behavior.



Lesson Plan

1. Inform students that they will be conducting their own survey to discover what other people in their community think are important issues for the candidates running for elected office.
2. Ask students to establish the goals of their survey. What exactly do they want to learn by surveying community members? The survey could focus on any of the following: issues, political knowledge of the election or candidates' positions on issues.
3. Hand out **Survey Savvy** and read with students. Discuss with students each segment of the handout.
 - ✓ What is the goal of our survey?
 - ✓ How will we select the people that we survey? What are the demographics of the community?
 - ✓ What type of sample will we seek? Representative vs. Convenience Sample? (Discuss the benefits and drawbacks of each type of sample.)
 - ✓ Have students develop survey questions examining issues, political knowledge or voting behavior. Brainstorm with students to frame quality questions for the survey.
 - ✓ Discuss the importance of valid survey questions.
4. (Optional): Depending on your students' abilities and interest, you may want to use the **Interviewing and Polling** handout instead of the **Survey Savvy** handout to deepen their understanding of how to formulate a survey.

Assignment Suggestions

- Have students pre-test their survey questions on one member of the community or school. After administering the survey, students should discuss with the person who took the survey what he or she felt each question meant and if any questions were confusing. Students should take note of any questions that are misleading, difficult to understand, or biased and collectively revise/eliminate invalid questions.
- Create final surveys. Have students administer their surveys to the determined number of community members. Students should then tally and analyze responses.
- Instruct students to write a summary of their survey results and their interpretation of the results.
- Have students reconsider/revise their Youth Issues Agenda to reflect the input of their respondents.



Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Compare neighborhood survey results to classroom findings
- Demonstrate democratic deliberation to determine their Youth Issues Agenda
- Provide evidence that shows why their chosen issues are important to the community

Preparation before Lesson 4

- Make one copy of [Survey Savvy](#) for each student.
- Make one copy of the [Community Interviews - Small Group Summary](#) for each group.
- Arrange access to the Internet and the [Student Voices website](#).
- Have available extra copies of [What's the Issue?](#) writing template for use in the assignment.



Lesson Plan

1. Explain the **Youth Issues Agenda** to students — that it is their class’s agenda of important issues facing their community, which they will present to the elected officials or community leaders to address. The Youth Issues Agenda is the central focus of the rest of the Student Voices curriculum and the key to moving forward. Using the information they have collected by interviewing community members, from analyzing data and survey results, and from their own opinions, students should come up with 1-5 items for a Youth Issues Agenda — things that can be changed to improve their community.
2. Divide students into groups of 4 or 5. Have students choose a facilitator and a recorder for each group. The facilitator should make sure that everyone is heard. The recorder is responsible for filling out the Community Interviews - Small Group Summary sheet.

NOTE: You may want to use alternate roles for individuals in the group if you have already established a system for sharing group work responsibilities in the class.

Specific Issues	CATEGORY
litter; abandoned buildings	ENVIRONMENT
large class size; school repairs	EDUCATION
unemployment; more businesses	ECONOMY
drugs; violence; theft	CRIME
terrorism; safe schools & neighborhoods	SECURITY
need for health insurance; access to hospitals	HEALTH
others...	HOUSING, TRANSPORTATION, FACILITIES

3. In their groups, have students share and discuss information collected on their individual **Community Interviews** sheets. If they have conducted a survey or analyzed data about the community, they should add their findings from these sources to the discussion of issues. Recorders should write down 2 to 5 issues from each student in the group. Each group should categorize the specific issues under major headings (as in the example table this page) and select 3 issues that group members consider to be most important for a Youth Issues Agenda. (If student groups cannot decide on the top 3 issues through



discussion alone, have them vote to choose the top 3 issues.) Encourage groups to prepare reasons for why they chose those 3 issues, using examples from their interviews, survey results, or census data to support their choices.

4. Have each group present their top 3 issues to the class, providing reasons for why these were chosen over others. Write down the Youth Issues Agenda items from each group on the board.
5. As a class, discuss these issues and select 1 to 5 of the most important ones for the class Youth Issues Agenda. If students cannot decide on their top 3 issues through discussion alone, have them vote to choose the top 3 issues.

Assignment Suggestions

- If the class cannot come to a consensus about the Youth Issues Agenda, assign students to write a 1-minute speech in favor of choosing their issue over others. Students should use data or other information to support their arguments for why this issue is one of the most important facing the community.
- Ask students to write about the issue they have found to be the most important one in their community—and the issue they believe is most important for candidates to address. (Students might want to use the [What's the Issue?](#) writing template. Teachers may want to fill in the template using one issue.) They should:
 - Name the issue.
 - Describe the issue and give examples of it — what is it? what does it look like? and so on.
 - Describe why they think the issue is important, including any information collected from the interviews or survey on what other people in the community think about the issue or any census data collected.
- Encourage students to send their writing to the [Student Voices website](#) for consideration for posting as a story or to send the writing to their local newspaper as a letter-to-the-editor.



Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Graphically represent the campaign
- Understand how federalism impacts issues in a campaign
- Identify possible formats for capstone projects

Preparation before Lesson 5

- Make one copy of [Making Voices Heard](#) concept map sample for each student
- One blank sheet of paper for each student



Lesson Plan

1. Explain to students that they will use the rest of the Student Voices semester to research how their issue has been addressed by candidates in the upcoming election. Their final activity of the semester will be to communicate their research about the campaign and the candidates to an audience in the real world.

NOTE: You may want to have students divide into issue research teams with each team creating a project about one of the issues on their Youth Issues Agenda. Or, you may want the class to work on a single issue and project together.

2. Distribute copies of the **Making Voices Heard Sample Concept Map** to students. Explain that concept mapping is one way to brainstorm ideas and use graphics/pictures to show how these ideas are related. Students should use circles to represent each of their ideas and straight lines or arrows to show how their ideas relate to one another.
3. Hand out a blank sheet of paper to each student. Instruct students to write “ways to share information” in a circle in the center of the paper. Have students draw circles around the center for “the media,” “the school,” and “the community.”
4. Have students brainstorm ways to share information on their issue (as it relates to the campaign) with each of these groups and add the ideas to the concept map. Some ideas for disseminating information include:
 - writing letters to the editor or opinion pieces to a local or school newspaper about the candidates’ positions
 - publishing brochures or launching websites as Voters’ Guides
 - holding an in-school expo about their issue and how it is addressed by the candidates
 - translating materials about candidates and issues from English into languages spoken by students and community members and distributing it in the neighborhood
 - creating and posting posters (with permission) in the school or community about the candidates and/or election
 - performing a skit on the candidates and issues at school or at community events
 - conducting a mock debate or mock campaign in the school
 - producing a PowerPoint presentation on the results of a community survey or research on the candidates
5. After students have completed their concept maps, have them choose their favorite idea and share it with the class. As a group, consider what it will take to use each of these methods of disseminating information. Ask the students to think about whether the format is realistic, feasible, relevant to the campaign, and the best way to communicate about the candidates and the election.
6. After considering the feasibility of each option as a class, choose one to pursue. This will be the class’s project for the rest of the semester.